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ABSTRACT

The 1988 report by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) entitled "Goals for Education: Challenge 2000" reflects concerns of government and educational leaders in the 15 states of the SREB area (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) by placing more emphasis on direct accountability of the educational system, expressed through the performance of students. The 12 goals targeted in the report include improving student achievement, decreasing dropout rates by 50%, and assuring that four out of five college-bound students are ready for college work. The following are examples of actions underway in SREB states: (1) reporting school progress through establishing indicators and data collection; (2) setting school accreditation standards; and (3) establishing school incentive and reward programs. The prosperity and unprecedented economic growth that characterized the SREB area in recent years are slowing, and officials in these states will soon be making tough decisions about educational funding. Failing to focus on outcomes for students and failure to use accountability to determine areas of success and areas where schools are not doing well will mean that disparities in opportunities and outcomes for disadvantaged students will continue and may increase. (SLD)

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Accountability in the SREB States

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Paper prepared for annual meeting of
American Educational Research Association
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Accountability in the SREB States*

In 1909 the School Commissioner of Georgia, as required by legislation, reported to the Governor and the General Assembly on schools of Georgia. The report had statements from local district school commissioners that included such items as:

- The schools were kept in session 120 days this year.
- 64 percent of the white students were enrolled in school.
- I think our schools are growing more efficient every year; we have furnished our schools with up-to-date desks.
- Ten years ago salaries ranged from $17 to $25 a month. Salaries are now $25 to $40 a month.
- A wagon route was established for transportation of pupils living beyond the two mile limit.

In the early 1970s, the reports from schools and school commissioners were similar--number of buildings, expenditures for education, school enrollments, teacher salaries, and number of school buses.

However, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s in the Southern Regional Education Board states, shifts in public expectations for education began to appear. Today, legislatures are calling on schools to be accountable--*What are students learning? How many graduate from high school? How many students go on to college?* Reports to legislatures from state boards of education or commissioners of education must show the progress of education. *What's a Penny Buying?*--the report in South Carolina on school progress mandated by the 1984 reform in that state--typifies a trend seen during the 1980s in SREB states. The public was willing to put extra money (in South Carolina an extra penny of sales tax) into education, but the public also wanted to know results. Governors and legislators were becoming far more involved in policies for schools.

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* Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia

Governors and Legislators Lead Reforms in the 1980s

Statements by several governors who have recently served as chairmen of the Southern Regional Education Board show the growing emphasis by the region's state leaders on accountability and a focus on results in education during the 1980s.

During the 1970s higher education in the South rapidly expanded to meet demands. In 1980 Governor Bob Graham of Florida, Chairman of SREB, gave a charge to higher education and governmental leaders in the South. "Now, we need to challenge higher education to focus on issues of quality by asking if they are doing a good job. . . . Today, the public is already demanding that college graduates be put to tests of proficiency." (SREB, 1980, p.4).

Governor Graham's statement the following year again demonstrated that political leaders' concern was broadening. Not only was there a need to provide higher education opportunities, but of equal importance, was the quality and results of education in the South--the focus was shifting to the student. "The need to forge closer links between colleges and schools is no better illustrated than by today's high technology manpower shortages and by the erosion of the general scientific literacy of the bulk of recent high school and college graduates." (SREB, 1981, p.4)

A year later, in 1982, Governor Harry Hughes of Maryland, as SREB Chairman, stated, "Leaders in education and government, aware that we must expect more than minimum competence from students in schools and colleges, are calling for a renewed commitment to quality education. Concern over the erosion of academic quality has increased in recent years, as sub par results on tests were registered by students and teachers in the schools, and as average scores on college entrance tests continued to decline.

o Are teachers, principals, and counselors well-prepared for their vital roles?

o Are young people being well-equipped for the rapidly charging world of work?

o Are college prep programs in high school readying students for higher learning?

o Are colleges and universities demanding enough of students?" (SREB, 1982, p.4)

Governor Richard Riley of South Carolina said it this way: "The youngsters who enroll in preschool kindergarten programs in fall 1985 represent a major challenge as they progress through the levels of elementary/secondary education. We must see to it that they are given classroom instruction which will result in satisfactory performance each and every step of the way. . . ." (SREB, 1985, p.6)

Today, as we move into the 1990s, leaders in the SREB states emphasize results more emphatically. Governor Ray Mabus of Mississippi in his June 1989 Chairman's report stated: "This year the Southern Regional Education Board issued a challenge: set specific goals and track how well we are succeeding. . . . An important element of each goal is the quantifiable target--all, *90 percent, 4 of 5, national levels or higher.* The public today demands this kind of accountability. Attempting to rally support with vague claims that schools and colleges are working harder and students are performing better is just not enough." (SREB, 1989, p.4)

No longer will counting and reporting the numbers of students enrolled in school, or the number of buses transporting children, satisfy the public and leaders in the SREB states.

Early Reforms Focus on Teacher Performance

While the emphasis on accountability has been central to SREB state education reforms during the 1980s, in the early to mid-1980s teachers and school administrators were seen as the key to improving student learning. Many of the early reforms in most SREB states focused on standards for and evaluations of teachers in the classroom.

The first massive state effort at reform of public education was in Mississippi. In Mississippi there were few public school kindergartens, weak compulsory attendance laws, and low teacher salaries and funding for education. These all led to legislative appointment of a task force to make recommendations to the state. Governor William Winter led the school reform, fashioned the task force recommendations into a comprehensive package, and called a special session of the Mississippi legislature in 1982. The legislature passed the historic *Mississippi Education Reform Act of 1982*--the first comprehensive state reform in the '80s (Task Force, 1983).

Robert Fortenberry, Superintendent of the Jackson Public Schools, summed up the new directions for education in that state. "While the reform act was being written, several important elements were written into the package. These were less visible in the media than kindergarten and compulsory attendance, but they are as significant and, in some ways, more far-reaching. Components covering educator responsibility and accountability for more and better student achievement are central to the Education Reform Act of Mississippi through its performance-based education. There is a directive that all children are expected to achieve mastery" (Clarion Ledger, October 1983). The Mississippi plan focused on accountability--holding teachers and school principals accountable for student performance. Linking the teachers and principals to student learning through a focus on what teachers and principals should do (as derived from research on effective schools) was clearly a hallmark of this plan.

Career ladder and teacher incentive programs created in 1983 and 1984 in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Texas focused on rewards for what teachers were doing in the classrooms. Leadership academies were established in states like Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia to improve skills of school principals. Evaluations for principals and teachers were mandated in many states. A state-supported Principal Assessment Center for the selection of school principals was started in South Carolina and the idea quickly spread to other states, such as North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

State reform efforts were not exclusively focused on teacher performance exemplified by the highly publicized tests for teachers or career ladder plans, but also included student performance in accreditation standards and incentive programs. In 1983, the Florida legislature passed a massive reform bill that raised high school graduation requirements and rewarded with scholars' diplomas and scholarships those students who took rigorous high school programs and accumulated high Grade Point Averages (GPAs). The reform legislation also provided funding for the performance of students who made grades of 3 or higher on Advanced Placement examinations. A key part of the bill was a focus on improving the quality of science and mathematics education in the state. Programs to reward the performance of teachers (the ill-fated master teacher plan) and the District Incentive Program to reward schools and their personnel were created.

During 1984, South Carolina and Tennessee passed legislation that called teachers, administrators, and students to higher standards. Tennessee's 1984 legislation--*Better Schools Program*--emphasized accountability and set targets for schools, such as "reducing by 20 percent the students who enter high school, but do not finish; increasing SAT and ACT scores to the national averages." South Carolina emphasized performance of students as a key in their reforms. The South Carolina Teacher, School, and Principal Incentive Programs rely heavily on progress in student achievement. The first state "report card on education," to show the public what progress has been made as a result of increased taxes, was mandated by the South Carolina Education Improvement Act of 1984. It has served as a blueprint for other such efforts in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Tracking Progress on Goals

SREB's 1988 report, *Goals for Education: Challenge 2000*, reflecting concerns by governmental and educational leaders in the region, clearly places more emphasis on direct accountability--that is performance of students. The twelve SREB goals targeted in the report include improving student achievement, decreasing dropout rates by one-half, and ensuring that 4 out of 5 college-bound students are ready for college work. The following goal clearly puts an emphasis on student performance in each school.

BY THE YEAR 2000--
All states and localities will have schools with improved performance and productivity demonstrated by results.

Indicators of progress include:

- o Establishing school standards and rewards based primarily on school outcomes, such as student achievement, attendance, and assessments of students' readiness for postsecondary education and employment;

- o Focusing on school-site results and rewarding schools for outcomes.

(SREB, 1988, p.17)

In developing systems to report on progress at state, district, and sometimes at school level, SREB states are shifting toward the use of the results of education--how students are achieving, how long students are staying in school. State accreditation standards are based more on student outcomes than the usual school inputs of counting library books, or square footage in a school, or finances. In addition, more states have in place, or are developing, incentive programs to reward schools that meet standards for student achievement, or student attendance, or reduction of dropout rates. Other states have developed sanctions for school districts that do not meet levels of student achievement.

While earlier notions about focusing on "performance of teachers and school principals" have not been abandoned, some SREB states, South Carolina and North Carolina for example, have passed legislation to allow flexibility and relaxed standards in exchange for results demonstrating progress in student achievement and reduction of dropout rates. The following are examples of actions underway in the SREB states.

Reporting School Progress

A Division of Accountability was established when South Carolina passed the *Education Improvement Act* (EIA) of 1984. According to the legislation, it was to be a special unit responsible for "planning, and development for the implementation of the Act." The unit is also responsible for providing an annual report on the schools. That report--*What's a Penny Buying?*--highlights school achievement, attendance, graduation rates, passing rates on Advanced Placement examinations, and extensive information about the EIA reforms.

During 1989, Target 2000 legislation extended the life of the Division of Accountability (originally 3 years) and called for more comprehensive measures that include, for instance, higher order thinking skills. An oversight committee reviews all reports of the Division and provides public monitoring of the legislation.

During 1989, legislation was passed in Arkansas to establish a Division of Accountability. No funding has been provided, but work is beginning on the efforts. The office is to be within the State Department of Education. According to the law, "the

foremost obligation of this office shall be to publish annual school report cards assessing the performance of schools and school districts. . . ." Comparisons are to be made over time and are to report on schools that have comparable characteristics, such as socioeconomic status of the students and size. The report card is to inform the public, at the least, on dropout rates, retention in grade rates, college-going rates, attendance rates, students required to take remedial courses in high school and college, scores on nationally normed tests, and pupil expenditures on administrative, athletic, gifted and talented programs. The "report card is to be published by December of each year." An advisory committee whose members are legislators, educators, and laypersons has been established. The same legislation also establishes a Joint Interim Oversight Subcommittee on Education Reform. It is a subcommittee of the legislative Joint Committee on Education.

The Louisiana *Children's First Act* of 1988 called for school, district, and state progress profiles to be developed. The progress profiles are to provide data for planning, to increase accountability, to provide information to parents and to the public, and to provide the data base for awarding money under the school incentive programs. Educators will receive detailed information that can be used for instructional planning. Indicators of progress include: student outcomes; demographics; student data, such as student attitudes; input measures, such as faculty/staff characteristics and teacher evaluation information; and others, such as parent/community support for schools and educational leadership information. Work has been underway on a system to collect information through existing and new collection methods. The State Department of Education will contract with an outside group for collection and presentation of the school report cards.

As a part of Oklahoma's *2000 Education Challenge Act*, the State Board of Education is called upon to develop and implement a system of measures "that report on the performance of schools and school districts so that the public is made aware of the progress and accomplishments of public education in the state." The Board is called upon to report such indicators as test scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates, among others. No one type of indicator is to be relied upon too heavily. The program is to include as many measures as possible that can be coordinated with national reporting, for example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The State Department of Education is currently working on development of the indicators to be collected and reported.

The North Carolina *School Improvement and Accountability Act* of 1989 (known as Senate Bill 2) calls on the State Board of Education to "develop and implement" a program. The State Board is to provide guidelines for district participation and school improvement plans that have three- to five-year student performance goals and annual milestones. The Board is to adopt a set of performance indicators that may include attendance and dropout rates, test scores, parental involvement, and postsecondary outcomes. An annual "report card" for the state and each district that looks at the state's performance over time and in comparison to other states is to be issued. Economic and demographic factors are to be taken into account.

School Accreditation Standards

In more and more states accreditation standards for schools are focusing on the results or outcomes of education. Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas, for instance, use student achievement test scores along with other measures to determine if schools are

meeting statewide standards. North Carolina focuses on results in their new school accreditation standards.

North Carolina's new system includes performance standards for accrediting schools. (The standards are defined by North Carolina as "positive results that accrue to students as a product of instructional and other educational experiences.") Student success is measured in standards such as: 80 percent of high school students are earning at least 5 units toward graduation during the school year; 35 percent of the graduating students are completing courses required for entry into the colleges and universities of the North Carolina system; 10 percent of graduating seniors have completed the courses required for the North Carolina Scholars Program; and dropouts are decreasing by 10 percent a year. Test scores on the annual testing program, end-of-course tests, and from nationally-normed tests are all part of the process. Progress in achievement, as well as present achievement levels, are reported. Districts that do not meet objectives will receive technical assistance. During 1988-89 in a trial run on the system, 30 districts failed to meet standards. The standards are mandatory for the 1989-90 school year.

Legislation in North Carolina in 1989 provides for a Performance-based Accountability Program that is optional for districts. Under the plan, districts are exempt from reporting to the state. (Local school improvement plans are not exempt from federal reporting requirements.) Districts are subject to the performance standards in accreditation, but are allowed flexibility in expenditure of funds, may be granted waivers to some state laws or regulations, and may receive funds for a differentiated pay plan for teachers and administrators.

The Alabama Board of Education in June 1988 passed "A Report on the Status of the Twenty Accountability Resolutions." These resolutions implemented several education improvement proposals. One resolution created a performance-based accreditation task force to develop a new system for accrediting schools. The 62 performance-based standards developed by the Task Force for Alabama School Systems include 13 student performance standards that are designed to connect instruction, achievement test scores, and other educational factors to student progress. The remaining 49 standards focus on system and school accountability and are indicators of educational conditions that promote student achievement and success.

In Virginia, in 1989 the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Secretary of Education proposed the Educational Performance Recognition Program. One part of the program is an indicator system that focuses on outcomes of schooling. Major categories include increasing the graduation rate and preparing students for college. School districts with similar characteristics are to be used to make fair comparisons, reporting outcome data by district and school. Also included is a revision of the Standards of Accreditation for schools based on outcome indicators. It is recommended that the current review process be eliminated. The current administrative review process concentrates on inputs and resources; reduction of burden of paperwork is intended with the new system. All current reviews will be monitored to determine what should be eliminated or reduced. The school accreditation process will emphasize improvement in educational practices and student learning, but allow local flexibility in the program to meet the standards. The outcome indicators project would also be used for an incentive and recognition program based on performance and progress. Those schools in need of improvement would receive technical assistance.

In Maryland the Governor's Commission on School Performance has issued a report that called for a comprehensive system of public accountability in which each school, school district, and the states are "held responsible for student performance." It recommended an accreditation system that uses information from parents and students, the school's teachers and administrators, and a review of educators from other systems. The focus will be on how successful the school is on showing results for each student. Incentives and sanctions to schools and districts will be based on performance. The plan is now being implemented with funding from the 1989 legislature.

School Incentive and Reward Programs

The following are excerpts from SREB's most recent survey on incentive programs in the nation (Cornett & Gaines, 1990).

> In Florida and South Carolina incentive programs have been underway for several years that provide money (either to a school or to school personnel) based on the outcomes of schools and performance of students. New school incentive programs in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas will provide money to schools that show desirable outcomes for students. A school incentive program is under consideration by the Mississippi legislature.

South Carolina's School Incentive Program, created in 1984, rewards schools that meet criteria which include improvements in student achievement and teacher and student attendance. The achievement criterion must be met for schools to receive awards. Legislation passed in 1989 includes reduction in dropout rates as an additional measure for high schools. By 1993-94, the criteria for schools must include exceptional or improved performance in higher order thinking and problem-solving. The cash awards go to schools, not the personnel in the schools. A school site council composed of teachers, the principal, and parents allocates the funds. Schools are placed in groups based on several factors, including socioeconomic status of the students. Schools that receive incentive awards are eligible to ask for flexibility in state rules and regulations.

The Florida High School Accountability Program created by 1989 legislation will award grants of $10,000 to $75,000 to high schools based on size and the number of indicators that are met by the school. The funds are to be used by the school "to improve productivity, including improvement of student outcomes." Schools are challenged to form partnerships with the community, business leaders, and parents. Accountability indicators include improving the graduation rate, the dropout rate, and the rates of promotion from one grade to another. Also included are indicators of student enrollments in higher level math and science courses and the reduction in the number of the high school's graduates who are placed in remedial studies in the freshman year for a postsecondary degree program. (This information is already reported to high schools through a program with postsecondary institutions in the state.)

The District Quality Instruction Incentive Program continues in Florida with funding of $10 million for 1989-90. This program, created by 1984

legislation, is negotiated at the district level and provides incentive money for schools that exceed expected student achievement. The program is intended to increase performance of students and to provide incentives to school personnel. At least half of the available money (awarded on the basis of student enrollment in the district) must go to school employees at meritorious schools. In addition to schools exceeding student achievement expectations, other standards can include vocational placement, winners of science fairs, student attendance, and parent participation. District programs may also include awards for instructional personnel with outstanding attendance, employment in critical shortage areas or high priority schools, superior performance evaluations, or completion of additional college credits. The State Department of Education provides technical assistance to schools, including several models for determining student achievement progress.

The School Incentive Program under development in Louisiana will initially identify at least 100 schools that have made significant progress based on such factors as test results, dropout rates, and graduation rates. The cash awards, which will go to the schools and are not for salaries of teachers, will be based on school profiles that will be prepared annually on every school and school system.

Legislation passed during 1989 in Texas (funded at $10 million over two years) created the Educational Excellence Program to reward gains made in the achievement of schools and school districts and to encourage innovative education programs.

What is not clear is whether the more recent trend to focus on students and schools and the results of the school as a unit means that there will be less emphasis on rewarding teachers for *what they do* as opposed to *what they produce*--what students learn. Most incentive plans for teachers provide additional money for teaching based on evaluations of teacher performance or on doing more--taking on additional work. While several career ladder or teacher incentive programs include student achievement as criterion (Arizona, South Carolina, and Utah), other mandates to include student achievement as one criterion in a career ladder or incentive plan have only led to delay in linking student performance to the actions of a single teacher. Although more newly developed programs are focusing on results for students, thousands of teachers continue to receive additional money for how they "perform in the classroom," or if they are "taking on additional work" by assuming duties as lead teachers or mentor teachers.

In North Carolina, for example, legislation passed during the last session continues funding of the Career Development Program for one more

year. It provides money for teachers based on evaluations of teaching that determine Career Level I or II. The legislation also broadens the performance concept by allowing districts to develop differentiated pay plans, with the Career Development Program as an option. If districts choose to participate, they must also be a part of the state accountability plan that focuses on results in the district but allows flexibility in how to meet and produce better results for students. A comment from one school board member in North Carolina provides one sentiment on the new legislation. "The Career Development Program is a personnel pay plan; the new legislation allows a student performance-based plan."

Accountability and the Future of the SREB States

As states in the Southern region of the country move into the 1990s, prosperity and unprecedented economic growth in many of the SREB states is slowing. States like Virginia and Maryland that have had double digit revenue growth are experiencing growth rates of 5 to 6 percent. Economies in oil-dependent states, for instance, Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, are struggling to recover and diversify. At the same time, the state tax dollars are meeting increasing demands from other needed services, such as health services and prisons. So far, the public in the SREB states has been willing to "up the ante" for schools. For instance, SREB states have out-paced the national rates of increase in teacher salaries (a 98.4 percent increase for the SREB states from 1979 to 1989 compared to 96.4 percent for the nation). SREB states spend greater amounts for education relative to per capita income than states across the nation. For instance, while the SREB states average 89.4 percent of the national average for state and local tax revenue per $1000 personal income, the SREB states average 98.9 percent of the national average state and local public school revenue per $1000 personal income (Gaines, 1989).

But, increasingly, state officials will be making tough decisions about funding education. Many SREB states face particular challenges because they have disproportionate numbers of citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom are black and Hispanic. Disparities in opportunities and outcomes are too often the case in every SREB state. Not focusing on outcomes for students and using accountability to determine areas of success and target where schools are doing an abysmal job will mean that those disparities will continue and may, in fact, become even greater. This is an unacceptable consequence to leaders in the SREB states.

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